

A Tesco Express said it hoped it would stop running out of fresh sandwiches after the council agreed to change the store's delivery restrictions. [BBC Cambridgeshire](#)

Not a Sandwich Shortage. Planning Surrender.

["Sandwich shortage ends as restriction lifted."](#) - BBC

["Tesco store allowed more deliveries to 'stock up on sandwiches' despite noise fears."](#) -Cambridge News

From those headlines, you might think Cambridge had faced a civic emergency. It hadn't. A multinational pushed to bend the planning rules, and the council – which also profits from Tesco's success – *said yes*.

This was *never* about sandwiches. This is not anti-sandwich — most of us are perfectly happy with a Meal Deal. It is about whether agreed planning protections mean anything once a large corporate decides they are inconvenient, and whether local people can trust decisions when public bodies have a financial stake in the very companies they are meant to regulate.

The Rules Were Clear. Until They Weren't.

Christ's Lane is a mixed-use site in a conservation area: flats directly above a loading bay, with Sunday and Bank Holiday deliveries banned from the start. That was the price of putting a service yard under people's bedrooms – shops below, homes above, one protected day of quiet written into the consent. Tesco moved in on those terms, then came back to *dismantle* them.

The only thing that had changed was Tesco's convenience. "Stock drops considerably." "Sandwiches run out." Operational preference repackaged as a planning emergency. No audited data. No proven financial harm. No serious noise testing for the homes on top of the bay. **Planning officers recommended approval regardless.**

Residents Showed Up; Some Councillors Spoke Out

Residents did what they are repeatedly encouraged to do. They read policy. They submitted detailed objections. They turned up at committee and spoke.

Cllr [Katie Thornburrow](#) reminded members that conditions agreed at the outset are meant to bind.

Cllr [Katie Porrer](#) located residents' objections squarely within adopted policy. Cllr [Tim Bick](#) asked what supporting city-centre living really means if people already living there cannot rely on agreed protections. Cllr [Tim Griffin](#) pressed officers on the evidential gaps and looked for a compromise grounded in fact.

The vote split 3–3.

As Chair, Cllr Martin Smart used his casting vote to approve.

Protections local residents had relied upon were removed in a single stroke.

A narrow margin. A *familiar* outcome.

When The Vote Is Tight, The Answer Is Still Yes

This is where the sandwich narrative falls apart. When evidence is thin and the committee is divided, the system still tips in one direction. If conditions hold only until a powerful operator challenges them, they are not safeguards. They are staging posts.

People see it. Pre-application discussions happen out of sight. Officer reports land with "approval recommended". Policy protections — daylight, amenity, heritage — are acknowledged, then *set aside*. By the time councillors vote, the outcome feels pre-aligned. Pressure is applied. Resistance is absorbed. The baseline *shifts*.

Quiet Shifts, Powerful Institutions Gain

Christ's Lane is not an anomaly. At Cheddars Lane on Newmarket Road, Tesco got [consent](#) for just internal changes and a mezzanine, with tighter water-use standards added because Cambridge is already short of water. Tesco then returned, not to improve the scheme but to strip those environmental standards out – and the council *said yes*. The store stayed. The planning safeguards went.

Planning erosion doesn't always arrive in a single dramatic decision. Often it advances in increments: just a taller building; just additional plant; just extended delivery hours; just more vehicle movements. The individual justifications differ. The trajectory does not.

The extra twist – the conflict is *structural*. Cheddars Lane Tesco sits in the council's [investment portfolio](#), paying rent into its income stream. The council is both planning authority and long-term landlord – and in that setup, the local public are the only ones not getting a return.

Why This Should Matter To You

You do not need to live at Christ's Lane or Cheddars Lane to recognise the implications. When the same bodies that regulate development also stand to gain from it, the ground quietly *shifts*.

Planning policy is framed as protection. It becomes flexible when a powerful institution applies pressure — or when a council has a stake in keeping a major tenant comfortable.

Daylight reduced. Homes disturbed. Heritage harm accepted. Noise increased.

The developer advances. The council and its partners remain secure. The public absorbs the cost.

Local Control Means Nothing Without Local Defence

As trust drains away, proposals are live to move planning powers into a new Greater Cambridge development body. At the same time, councillors [argue](#) those powers must remain local – that they understand their wards.

But *local control* only carries weight if local decisions *defend the public* when it counts — especially where the authority is meant to be a neutral referee yet has a financial interest in the outcome.

A council cannot have it both ways: defend local control in rhetoric while its decisions repeatedly align with commercial interests, and still expect people not to join the dots.

Trust Is Lost — And Rebuilt — One Vote At A Time

Christ's Lane Action Group is not stepping back. We will continue to scrutinise applications, challenge thin evidence, and show up when it matters. We will continue organising local communities. We will continue working with councillors prepared to hold the line when it would be easier not to.

Trust is rebuilt the same way it is lost: decision by decision; vote by vote.

When a planning decision affects your area, ask your ward councillors one clear question:

When corporate convenience and institutional power collide with the public interest, which will you vote to defend?

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In solidarity,

Christ's Lane Action Group (**CLAG**)

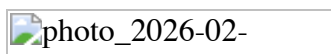




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